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DE RUCNDT #1072/01 1452008
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 252008Z MAY 06
FM USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9155
INFO RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0668
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0446
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1337
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 0437
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2162

UNCLAS USUN NEW YORK 001072

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: MAY 24 INFORMALS ON ENVIRONMENT HIGHLIGHT
DELEGATIONS' FRUSTRATION WITH OVERLOADED UN AGENDA

Summary

¶1. (U) Co-chairs of the informal consultation process on the framework of the UN's environment activities, Ambassador Maurer of Switzerland and Ambassador Berruga of Mexico, convened a one hour meeting May 24 to brief New York delegations on the outcome of their recent trips to Nairobi and Geneva, to distribute a new co-chairs' letter containing a new set of questions for delegations to consider, and to discuss next steps in this process. More noteworthy than the substance of the co-chairs' briefing was the strong push-back from numerous delegations on the co-chairs' ambitious schedule of 4-5 meetings proposed for June. A number of key delegations made clear that given the many other UN reform processes still in play, and the intensive preparations for the July Substantive Session of ECOSOC soon to begin, this additional heavy load proposed for the environment track was more than the traffic could bear. End Summary.

The Process Up Til Now

¶2. (U) Co-Chairs Maurer and Berruga began the meeting with a quick overview of the state of play on the environment consultation track. They said their Geneva and Nairobi meetings earlier in the month showed "a broad similarity of views" to those New York delegations provided during the April 19 and April 25 meetings here. Among the views expressed in all three venues was agreement that there is room for improvement in international environmental governance (IEG), and that we should focus on ways that would have the biggest positive impact on the ground. Many delegations, they said, stressed that the starting point should be improving the functioning of existing institutions, implementing UNEP's 2002 IEG decisions at Cartagena and its 2004 Bali Strategic Plan on Technology Support and Capacity Building, and improving implementation at the national level, but that some had called for more fundamental reform of the overall IEG structure. They stated that there is a "general view that we are confronted with a degrading environment" and that "many delegations" had pointed to "a weak and fragmented international system suffering from inadequate resources, too many meetings and overly burdensome reporting requirements." That said, they also noted that some delegations had argued that the fragmentation decried by others was actually a positive thing, as it reflected the reality of the myriad technical specializations inherent in the field. The

co-chairs also noted they had had an opportunity for joint meetings with members of the High Level Panel (HLP) on UN System-wide Coherence and looked forward to the two processes reinforcing each others' work.

Co-Chairs Propose Ambitious Schedule of Meetings for June

¶3. (U) Following this short overview, the co-chairs distributed a new co-Chairs' letter (e-mailed to IO/EDA and OES/ENV) containing about two dozen questions derived from previous discussions which they asked delegations to reflect on and be prepared to discuss at the next meeting. They also laid out their proposed schedule for June (outlined at the end of the letter) that would have a succession of meetings on June 6/7, June 13, June 20 and June 27.

Push Back on an Already Overloaded Reform Agenda

¶4. (U) Following the co-Chairs presentation, South Africa (speaking for the G-77), Egypt, India and the U.S. all took the floor to register serious concern about the series of five meetings the co-Chairs have proposed for June. All noted that the UN calendar is already extremely crowded with multiple negotiations on a number of outstanding UN reform issues including mandate review, the ECOSOC reform and development resolutions, and a full schedule of meetings/negotiations in preparation for July's Substantive Session of ECOSOC in Geneva. South Africa, Egypt and India -- clearly seeking ways to slow the environment track down -- all called for the Secretariat to produce more background papers before delegations could adequately consider the questions contained in the co-Chairs' new letter. Egypt also

complained that the background papers provided thus far had been produced by UNEP alone and that delegations needed to hear input from other relevant UN bodies (Note: Egypt also took issue with the scope of these consultations, and stated that future discussions should be based on all of para 169 of the WSOD, which also included operational activities and humanitarian assistance, as well as para 168, not only its environmental component.) The only other delegation to take the floor was Austria, speaking for the EU, which said that it was comfortable with the co-Chairs' proposed schedule.

Co-Chairs Signal Willingness to Scale Back Plans for June

¶5. (U) In response to this, Ambassador Berruga said he and Ambassador Maurer understood that "many delegations were overstretched with UN reform meetings and are cognizant that ECOSOC is looming." He said their goal had been to "try to accomplish as much as possible before July and August interrupts our work." That said, hearing the concerns raised by delegations, Berruga suggested that the next meeting might be held the week of June 13, vice June 6, and that "perhaps four meetings in June is too much . . . perhaps two meetings might be better." The Co-Chairs asked for delegations to provide feedback on how best to proceed as soon as they could so that they could plan accordingly. South Africa said it would have to consult with the G-77 before providing a formal answer.

Comment

¶6. (U) The scheduling skirmish with the co-Chairs illustrates the growing frustration many delegations feel about the relentless pace of reform negotiations that the PGA has pursued since September, and which -- in reality -- began over a year ago in the run up to the World Summit. While many

substantive differences may well divide delegations on any particular issue, a growing feeling appears to be emerging that President Eliasson has overloaded the circuits. Many delegations are simply exhausted and overstretched -- a reality that appears to be harming the quality of discussions here and increasing the polarization we have seen on many issues.

BOLTON